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Washington Post

OCT 18 1958

Labor Shortage . . . Discontent

Vast Drive to Mobilize Peasants In Red China Runs Into Trouble

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Manchester Guardian

LONDON — Mao Tse-tung's revolutionary plan for the implementation of China's 500 million peasants in "people's communes" has been virtually completed, but distant rumblings which have been coming from Peking in a few days show that the more organization is causing dangerous dislocation in the country's economic life.

The communes, which at the beginning of last month comprised 30 per cent of China's peasant households, now embrace more than 90 per cent, although the original announcement indicated that spring as the time limit for total "communization."

Like Stalin's collectivization drive, the Chinese drive seems to have overreached itself. Peking People's Daily has now published an article about the need for "long-term patient education" which must be used in the struggle against the "individualism and personalism" that have become apparent in the course of the campaign for the formation of the communes.

Labor Shortage Noted

But, most important of all, the idea that the regime's notion of the peasants would provide an inexhaustible source of labor for the building up of local industries has received a rude shock. The communes, by forming economic units of about 10,000 households, were to make possible a division of labor which would provide millions of new hands for the local industries while leaving enough labor for agriculture.

For the past month the Chinese press has been full of descriptions of the successes of the new industrial army, whose units have marched into the mountains to dig for iron ore and coal, have built more than 300,000 traditional furnaces for the smelting of iron and the making of steel, and have engaged in a multitude of other industrial tasks.

Assigned to double China's steel output this year by bringing it up to 10,700,000 tons.

Only now has Peking radio revealed that grain is being left in the fields because of a manpower shortage caused by transfers to iron and steel production.

The People's Daily has said the drive about the shortage of labor, "more serious than in the past," which was being felt everywhere in the rural areas. It warned local officials against concentrating on industry to the detriment of agriculture.

No Modification In Sight

Since these same officials are responsible to the higher authorities for fulfilling each locality's quota of iron production, the transfers of labor to industry will probably be stopped only if Peking modifies its ambitious steel plans. So far there is no sign of this being done, and the unfortunate local officials — to say nothing of the peasants turned into industrial workers — must make one pair of hands do the work of two or more.

In many areas this has been done by "liberating" the women from household duties and making them take their menfolk's places in the fields, but the provision of "public mess-halls and the disruption of family life implicit in this has not passed without protest. The People's Daily reports peasants as saying that "everything is good about the commune, except that the sharing of meals together does not suit my taste."

In the Kweichow commune, where such objections were expressed, a public debate resulted eventually in "unanimous agreement" that the mess halls were the most effective way of saving manpower. It was also agreed that

mess hall feeding was voluntary, but presumably the earlier agreement about its effectiveness as a labor-saving arrangement made members "volunteer" for communal feeding.

Other objections listed in a dispatch from Honan include the views that guests cannot be entertained at home, that there would not be enough to eat, and that "labor productivity would be increased if there would be no time for rest."

That this last fear is entirely groundless is borne out by this passage in a dispatch from Tsinghai: "As many production teams worked continually for 24 hours a day, the leadership did not have to urge and supervise people working in the fields, but only to try to control the intensity of labor."

The final stimulus for the formation of the Kweichow commune was provided by an old peasant who asked: "What is the difference between Kung she and a po she?" (Kung she, the Chinese characters of the word "commune," may also be literally translated as "grandfather's house" and "po she" as "grandmother's society.")

Such crass ignorance has much for the local officials to put up with, and they say that "when we heard this, we immediately developed in the whole county a big debate on the question 'Is it good to build people's communes?' After two nights of debate, the absolute majority of the cooperative members came to understand the advantages of the commune and decided that it be speedily established."

But the practical problems which crop up again and again in this attempt to change overnight the way of life of millions of people have not been solved by "debating," even at last two nights.

in Communist China, in Sanguan Tularak, former Ambassador to Peking.

The country is under martial law and the Constitution has been suspended. Marshal Sarit's Revolutionary party, composed of military, police and other leaders, announced yesterday that it would rule the country from army headquarters. Marshal Sarit led a coup fifteen months ago that ousted the government of Field Marshal Pibol Sangram and led to the regime of Premier Thanom Kittikachorn, who resigned yesterday. The Supreme Commander returned here Sunday after a long stay in Britain for medical treatment.

A representative of Marshal Sarit, on the United States Ambassador, U. Alexis Johnson, to assure him that Thailand's adherence to her international commitments was unchanged by the "revolution."

Dole Sarasin, Secretary General of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, who headed an interim government after last fall's coup, was called in again yesterday. But this time, he said, it was only to advise the setting of a committee aimed at assuring other governments that Thailand's foreign policy was unchanged.

The statement prepared by Mr. Sarasin made four major points in outlining the policies of the Government:

1. Loyalty to King Phumiphon.

2. Safeguarding of human rights according to United Nations Human Rights Declaration.

3. Affirmation of all international obligations and adherence to SEATO.

4. Protection for courts of law. "They wanted it understood," Mr. Sarasin said, "that the whole transformation, or revolution, is not concerned with foreign relations."

It is still unclear what Marshal Sarit hoped to accomplish by his dramatic return from Britain and the subsequent coup, which appears to be almost a revolt against himself, since he was taught to rule through Premier Thakom.

A follower of Marshal Sarit declared, however, that the action taken could not be called a coup "because a coup is directed against the Government — this was against the National Assembly."

Nai Khuang Aphaiwongse, leader of the Democrats, the major Opposition party, said his group was discussing what to do but could not because the party was banned.